

USE A SYSTEMS APPROACH

Grazing systems range from continuous use of one pasture over a long period of time, to intense grazing of small areas for short periods of time. There are trade-offs for every system, and you'll have to decide which system works best for your operation. You may want to combine concepts and develop a system that works into your time schedule, livestock operation and available pasture.

Continuous grazing

is a one pasture system where livestock are left to graze in a large area for the entire season.



Advantages:

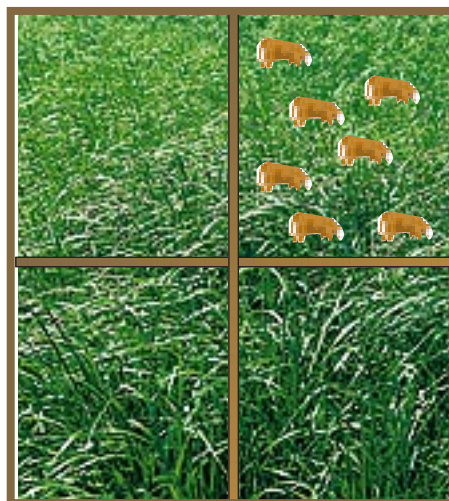
- ✓ Requires least labor and time.
- ✓ Capital costs are minimal.
- ✓ Animals can eat the best plants if not overstocked.

Disadvantages:

- ✓ Lower stocking rate and less pounds produced per acre.
- ✓ Lower forage quality and yields.
- ✓ Uneven pasture use.
- ✓ Weeds and brush may be a problem.
- ✓ Both overgrazing and under grazing can occur in the same pasture more easily because of a lack of options to move livestock.
- ✓ Animal manure is distributed unevenly.

Rotational grazing

is a system with more than one pasture in which livestock are moved, usually on a calendar schedule.



Advantages:

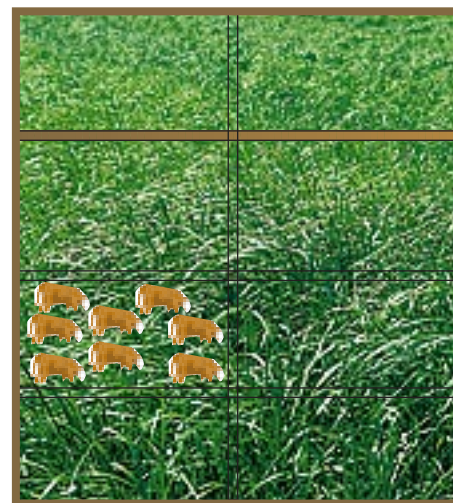
- ✓ Can increase forage production and condition of pasture over a continuous system.
- ✓ Allows pastures to rest and allows for regrowth.
- ✓ Can provide for longer grazing season, reducing winter feed.
- ✓ More even distribution of manure throughout the paddocks.

Disadvantages:

- ✓ Fencing costs and water supply establishment can be higher than in continuous systems.
- ✓ Although forage production is increased over continuous grazing, it is not as high as intensive grazing systems.

Multi-paddock intensive grazing

is a system with more than two pastures, sometimes referred to as paddocks. Livestock are moved often from paddock to paddock, according to forage use and allowing for rest periods.



Advantages:

- ✓ Highest forage production and use per acre.
- ✓ Weeds and brush are usually controlled naturally.
- ✓ More even distribution of manure throughout the paddocks.
- ✓ Usually increases stocking rates and livestock seem more content.
- ✓ Gives more forage options. Pastures can be rested and grazed more efficiently.

Disadvantages:

- ✓ Requires careful monitoring of forage.
- ✓ Initial costs may be higher due to fencing materials and water.
- ✓ Water distribution systems may be more complicated due to the increased number of paddocks.

YOUR SYSTEM'S PARTS

A system is made up of different parts, and your system is customized depending on how you put the parts together. This publication will cover five components of a grazing system.

Forages

Choosing and managing forages for your operation is key. You'll want forages that meet nutritional needs of your livestock and that are suited for your soils. Consider a mix of cool-season and warm-season grass pastures, as well as grass-legume mixtures. Plan for year-around forage needs to ensure high quality forage when livestock nutritional requirements are high.

Water

Good water is key to producing healthy livestock. As you use more pastures for improved grazing and production, you may need to be creative in how you supply good water so livestock won't have to travel far. Look for underground, surface and human made sources such as rural water, and keep livestock out of the drinking water supply if you can.

Fences

Fence plans should allow flexible rotational grazing, allow access to water and keep livestock in the pastures as intended. Options vary from permanent fences to temporary electric fences for small paddocks.

Fertility

A good fertility program is just as important for pastures as it is for croplands. Soil testing to assess fertility needs is a key step.

Weed and brush control

Keys to weed and brush control include establishing a vigorous stand of forage and a sound grazing plan, mowing and clipping as needed, and herbicide use as necessary. Early identification and action on weed problems can eliminate bigger problems later.

"You get the biggest bang for your buck from your first split of pastures."

*Mark Boswell
Adams County farmer*

Grazing systems have several components in common, including forages, water, fences, soil fertility, and weed and brush control. What will make your system unique is how you integrate these pieces to fit your resource and operation goals.

